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WHAT ROLE SHOULD CANADA PLAY IN CAMBODIA DURING AND AFTER THE 1998 ELECTIONS?

-A Report of the Vancouver Roundtable-

March 1998

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What Role Should Canada Play in Cambodia During and After the 1998 Elections?
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This is the report of a roundtable on policy recommendations for Canada's role in Cambodia. Themes emerging from the discussions included international leverage, the political environment, the credibility of the electoral process, the economic situation, reform of the justice system, the role of civil society and the media. In particular, reference was made to the need to use multilateral approaches to put pressure on Cambodia and on its leader, Hun Sen, if there are to be free and fair elections or changes in Cambodia; the personal contacts and relationships that stabilise the current government and serve as obstacles to change; the absence of a climate conducive to economic growth, the need to create a culture of human rights and support for local NGOs; the absence of a free media.

Recommendations:

Canada should not disengage but instead increase its bilateral programming, and look at a comprehensive strategy for future engagement with Cambodia. More specifically, it should:
- work to integrate Cambodia into the region and integrate civil society and the state into a larger, longer-term developmental process;
- assist Cambodia's integration into ASEAN and out of its current isolation;
- expand humanitarian aid to include bilateral initiatives to help support the evolution of democratic processes and capacity-building;
- continue to support the UN Commission on Human Rights as the most transparent body in the country;
- use the Canada Fund to strengthen civil society groups and for the Canadian Embassy to show visible support for civil society groups;
- support the development of a freer and better trained media;
- assist in building schools and putting teachers back to work.

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March 20, 1998

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By IMPACS - Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

A day long workshop hosted by the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development was held March 20, 1998 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Among the multi-sector grouping of 15 experts were journalists, lawyers, human rights advocates, an NGO representative, former diplomats , DFAIT and CIDA officials, former UN officers, a management consultant, academics and researchers. Some participants had recent experience in Cambodia, all were current and well-informed and shared a concern for Cambodia and its future (see Appendix A: Participants list)

Peacebuilding in Cambodia, a report by Chris Cooter for Peacebuilding and Human Development Division, DFAIT (March 3, 1998) was provided in advance of the workshop as background reading. The objective of the roundtable was to provide policy recommendations to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa, on Canada's role in Cambodia during and after the upcoming July 1998 elections.

To set the context and provide current information in the morning session, a video filmed two days before and featuring **Gordon Longmuir**, Canadian Ambassador to Cambodia, was presented. Ambassador Longmuir provided an overview of the current political climate in Cambodia including an outline of the Friends of Cambodia and the Japanese Four Pillars initiative.

Kate Frieson, Southeast Asia Program Associate, Centre for Asia Pacific Initiatives, University of Victoria provided an historical analysis of the electoral process. Ms. Freissen spoke about the lack of social cohesion, constraints on non-governmental organizations, internal government dissension, personalized politics and the impact of economic liberalization. (Stephen Owen, Director, Institute for Dispute Resolution, UVIC, and member of Cambodia's Dispute Resolution Centre was unable to attend due to illness but was interviewed a few days later). The group concentrated their discussion on the role Canada should play during the electoral process.

The afternoon panel focused on the role Canada should play in the post election process - the role of NGOs, CIDA, universities, and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Former Ambassador to Cambodia, **Martin Collacott**, presented a background on the tensions of leadership, the narcotics trade, financial weaknesses, Cambodia's increased isolation and the role of China. Lawyer and former UN human rights officer in Cambodia, **Kathy Neilson**, emphasized the long-term assistance needed by Cambodia despite the election outcome, particularly to the provinces for education, humanitarian aid, and institution-building.

Eric Yendall, Director General, of Southeast Asia, Asia Branch at CIDA described current CIDA support for Cambodia. He indicated future areas of support will likely involve good governance, civil society (human rights, promotion of NGOs), grass roots rural development and human resource development. In the proceeding discussion, the group was given the task of identifying an appropriate and comprehensive role for Canada after the July elections.

The report which follows outlines the major themes which emerged in the discussion, followed by a series of recommendations which address Canada's role in Cambodia during and after the 1998 elections.

2.0 SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION THEMES

During the panel presentations the following themes emerged: international leverage, the political environment, the credibility of the election process, the economic situation, reform of the justice system, the role of civil society and the media.

2.1 International Leverage

International Pressure The international community needs to use multilateral approaches to put pressure on Cambodia, and must be tough on the current leader Hun Sen, if there are to be free and fair elections or changes in Cambodia. International support for the Japanese Four Pillars Initiative and participation in the election of all political parties and leaders is imperative. Canada is working through the Friends of Cambodia to support the Japanese initiative in full which includes the return of Prince Ranariddh to Cambodia.

Impunity It is essential that impunity be addressed for the elections to appear fair and open. Mary Robinson (UN Commissioner for Human Rights) has offered experts to assist with a process to address this and Peter Burns, a Canadian professor of Law, will visit Cambodia in April to evaluate the investigations of the 1997 extra judicial killings.

Regional stability Cambodia is increasingly isolationist; Hun Sen doesn't need the international community in his eyes. Cambodia's UN seat is vacant, and Cambodia has been rejected by ASEAN. Cambodia needs to be part of the process for regional stabilization, otherwise the country may look to China for support.

Domestic instability The recent breakdown of the coalition government requires international intervention to address the elections and peace-building.

The forces leading to the breakdown are still there. "The peace process is under duress - the war has never really ended". There is an absence of real reconciliation and political opposition is not seen as legitimate. Weapons are still readily available.

2.2 Political Environment

National Assembly The government has not functioned well. There has been no real political debate on issues, and this has affected the balance of power, (factions, mistrust). MPs are powerless on their own. If the CPP wins the July election (with alliances) and they continue to control most of the bureaucracy and institutions then an opposition may not be able to function, resulting in 'grid-lock'. One potentially positive indication is that the fighting last summer has loosened some log-jams and a political dynamism is taking place which is somewhat pluralistic. Some participants felt that the return of Prince Ranariddh is essential to the process of democratic development. Although many individuals have reservations about Ranariddh's ability to lead, he was elected Prime Minister in 1993, and the Cambodian people have a right to have him present in the 1998 elections.

Power-sharing mechanisms Mechanisms for dialogue and power sharing need to be identified because of the absence of cooperation. There is a lack of distinction between the party and the government and past attempts at power-sharing were not based on consensus. This has lead to a very deep mistrust and factionalism.

Leadership The current government is based on personal contacts and relationships. This has meant that the situation stayed somewhat stable, as long as the leaders had some relationship. There is a deep reluctance for any movement towards changes. "We are not dealing with monolithic parties, CPP is more than Hun Sen. There are likely individuals who are far worse than Hun Sen and some who are better. Therefore, Canada should identify those with whom it can work". The Cambodian leadership has little experience with democracy. "We are talking about raw power, not leadership in a democratic process as we know it". It is unclear where the current leadership under Hun Sen is taking the country Having a basic assessment of where Hun Sen is going is crucial, and addressing how one becomes a democratic ruler in a non-democratic environment should be part of the assessment.

Safety and Security Travel is fairly secure around the country, although parts of the country-side can be dangerous. This does lead to some climate of fear and intimidation. The urban areas are vibrant, open and relatively free of military presence.

2.3 Credibility of the Election Process - "Are they free and fair?"

A recent French poll indicates that 16.6% of the population would vote for Hun Sen, 17.4% for Ranariddh and 17% for Sam Rainsy. - 60% would not express an opinion in the upcoming election. The Cambodian Internet News Service reported that if international assistance doesn't come forward an Israeli-Argentinian map-making company would be contracted to organize the election process (census, voter registration, balloting etc.) Any violence during the election will be between political parties not the ordinary people of Cambodia and violence is likely in the run-up to the elections. The CPP is trying to position itself to secure 70% of the vote through alliances. The question will be whether people will want to participate because of fear and cynicism. The credibility of a census and voter registration is a concern and impunity has still not been addressed.

Free and fair elections There was some discussion about who's definition of free and fair elections we are using: "If the participants are happy with the outcomes then we have to accept that. We have to accept Cambodia as it is - not what we want." Discussion concentrated on the series of conditions outlined in Chris Cooter's background document. Do these conditions currently exist for free and fair elections? One participant suggested that it is unlikely that the Cambodian elections meet any of the conditions outlined in Cooter's report.

Voter education It was emphasized that voter education will help to decrease violence prior to the election but it was not clear on what is meant by voter education at this time. "The objective shouldn't be perfection, but some steps forward in pluralism where the majority of people vote". There should be support to those in the provinces, not just the urban areas.

Broadcast Media The possibility of using the broadcast media for voter education as a means of countering factionalism was discussed. NGOs could have a role as they have access to the people and could assist with reducing voter intimidation. However, third party access has not been granted and in the absence of access to a neutral broadcast facility, the impact of NGO voter education efforts may be limited.

Election monitors and observers Canada has four advisors in the Elections Commission now and some Canadian NGOs are assisting with voter education. The election process needs to be monitored and closely observed by a large and credible representation of foreign observers.

2.4 Economic Situation

A climate conducive to economic growth doesn't exist. Money did flow in after the last election, however this primarily served to finance government officials thus increasing the position of the elites. Investors are confounded by the dualism in the midst of high inflation. The high level of corruption in government siphons off local revenue, as well as international aid. "Patronage, payoffs and protection" are rampant. The international community has also voiced concerns about the revenues being raised through the narcotics trade and the devastating logging practices.

2.5 Reform of the Justice System

The judicial system is weak and corrupt and still functions in the "communist-mode". There is a deep mistrust amongst groups. There is a need to assist reform of the judiciary and support the development of democratic institutions resulting in proper investigation, acceptable police methods and an independent judiciary. Currently there is no trust in the police. The reform of the judiciary is key to the future.

2.6 Civil Society

Civil society groups are crucial to the future of Cambodia. There is a need to create a culture of human rights and support for local NGOs. Although many NGOs are perceived as politically aligned, there are individuals interested in building independent non-partisian organizations. Basic resources are needed to support the development of civil society. For example, basic support could include supplying motorcycles for transport and per diems for rural extension workers so they don't have to return to their homes each night. People need free and fair access to information and the media. Although international efforts have helped to build a more visible civil society, basic resources are still needed to support this development.

2.7 Role of the Media

The print media is relatively active, but at best, propagandist. The existence of an informed, neutral free press doesn't exist in Cambodia. NGOs do not currently have third party access to the media. For example the Women's Media Centre has not been able to show their voter education videos. The question is how can Canada assist in educating people about the election through the media? A second issues is what role can Canada play in training Cambodian journalists who by and large are self-trained and politically aligned?

3.0 OUTCOMES OF THE WORKSHOP

Initially there was not a great deal of optimism in the group. There was a diversity of views of where the pressure points should be to give credibility to the election process. One participant suggested that "Cambodia is a failed state in a pre-democratic mode, that Canada needs to learn from the lessons of Burma and identify how to re-legitimize the government and support the people of the country". Most participants agreed that Canada needs to take a tough line with Cambodia, and particularly with Hun Sen and decide what levels of support should be channeled through NGOs, bilateral or multilateral institutions

It was also agreed Canada shouldn't abandon the process, step back or disengage from Cambodia. Canada should pick and choose where it can be helpful and effective, and not spread itself too thin in its engagement. The election will take place, so preparing people is crucial. However, most participants felt that the election was not the event to plan for, and that, events during the electoral process should be seen as part of a larger and on-going developmental process.

3.1 Pre-Election Recommendations: What can realistically be done in four months?

Canada's position prior to the election Canada supports free and fair elections and deplores corruption and human rights abuses in Cambodia. Therefore, Canada should go on record now. Minister Axworthy should make a statement four or five days before the upcoming New York meeting of the Friends of Cambodia. Ambassodor Longmuir should urge the group to make a more public statement supporting free and fair elections and democratic development in Cambodia.

Election Monitors A strong foreign presence will assist with order during the elections. Canada should send a large group of monitors from Canada, including NGO representatives, to monitor the election procedures and monitor whether NGOs are being suppressed prior and during the election process. Canada should ensure media election coverage is part of the monitoring process. Accompaniers for civil society groups, particularly NGOs, should be in place to ensure their safety and support at this time. Their presence would reduce risks to civil society groups.

Media While the media is largely dominated by political factions it can potentially play an important role, particularly in the rural areas. Focus of training of journalists should be on radio and television broadcast media, which are politically controlled and the key sources of information. Some journalists

were trained for the last election and they could have further instruction and training to build on this capacity. If training for journalists is not possible before the election, Canada should play a role in ensuring that NGOs' voter education videos are broadcast on radio and television.

Impunity Canada needs to recognize the real problems of impunity and put pressure on the Cambodian government to resolve this issue immediately.

Multilateral Leverage Canada should continue to support the Japanese Four Pillars Initiative and work through the Friends of Cambodia of which Canada is a member. Wherever possible, Canada should be tough on Hun Sen and pressure him for free and fair elections this July.

3.2 Post Elections Recommendations: Canada's Role in the Long-Term

The election should not be the bench mark for determining what if any assistance should be provided to Cambodia. A clear message for the Canadian government is "don't use the upcoming election as a decision point for disengaging and pulling out of Cambodia". Use the election as an opportunity to change strategies of engagement as appropriate. Work to integrate Cambodia into the region and integrate civil society and the state into a larger, longer-term developmental process.

3.2a Regional Stability

Canada should assist Cambodia's integration into ASEAN, the regional body of South East Asia, and out of its current isolation. Canada should continue to use multi-lateral approaches to pressure a new government, likely under the leadership of Hun Sen, to work towards democratic development.

3.2b Development Assistance

There is a need for a review of Canada's aid program to Cambodia once the nature of the post-election government becomes clearer. The current emphasis on humanitarian aid needs to be expanded to include bilateral initiatives to help support the evolution of democratic practices. Canada will need to assess whether the conditions are present for sustainable development (capacity building) assistance. The issues of governance are paramount and the needs of the country are fundamentally long-term. There is a need for a long term, comprehensive strategy of assisting Cambodia including support for NGOs, education of the young, grassroots rural development and de-mining throughout the country.

3.2c Peace-Building

Land mines Canada has committed significant resources to clear land mines. It is a large and essential initiative which should continue to receive Canadian attention.

Dispute-resolution Canada should support the development of reliable dispute settlement by building on cultural practices in judicial education and conflict resolution. Do not import models. Instead, explore what role the monastic community, which is seen as neutral, can play. Reconciliation is consistent with Buddhist principles. The pagoda and monks should be used to explain and resolve conflicts and in turn play a role in advising Ministers such as Interior, Defence and Justice.

Human Rights Human rights should be looked at in terms of meeting basic human needs and meeting international regulations. Canada should continue to support the UN Commission on Human Rights as the most transparent body in the country.

National Healing Process While the experience of South Africa is very different, the experiences of the Truth and Reconciliation process has contributed to the healing of the country in the post-apartheid period. Canada should examine whether such a mechanism, suitable to the Cambodian situation, would work. (Note: This suggestion emerged during follow-up with a participant unable to attend the workshop)

3.2d Civil Society

"The needs of Cambodia will go on despite the outcome of the election. If Canada disengages, we risk abandoning those who are struggling for peace and democratic development".

Financial and moral support Canada should use the Canada Fund to strengthen civil society groups. Primary assistance should be directed to Cambodian groups in the provinces that are already in place. They particularly need moral support.

Safety and protection Civil society groups need protection and strengthening. The support for accompaniers goes beyond monitoring, in that their presence along side of local groups, reduces the latter's vulnerability to risk. There is need for visible support from the Canadian Embassy to ensure civil society groups have a voice, especially those engaged in human rights and democratic development. These groups need moral support and a visible indication that a country like Canada is supportive of their work. Canada should monitor whether NGOs are

being suppressed and support NGOs who are trying to broaden the discourse.

Partnerships Canada should promote civil society partnerships such as those of the Canadian Bar Association. The partnership of the University of Victoria Institute for Dispute Resolution and the Cambodian Dispute Resolution Institute is strong. They are looking at election abuses, training election commissioners and have strong links to the Buddhist community. Strong partnerships between Canadian and Cambodian NGOs, similar to the CIDA funded Indonesia-Canada Forum model, should be supported by Canada.

Media Canada should support the development of a freer and better trained media after the election. More specifically, Canada should define how it can work with a state broadcaster to improve radio and TV Cambodia in the long-term. It should look for individuals and work with them to increase the variation of views while being careful not to strengthen a propaganda vehicle. Information and broadcast technology needs to reach a greater number of Cambodians. The technology needs to be improved to bring in news from more regional and international sources and ultimately Canada should work towards the creation of a School of Journalism in Cambodia.

3.2e Education and Training

Formal education Concentration should be on the younger generation as it is the key to transforming the society.

Institution-building Canada should assist building schools and putting teachers back to work. The administration staff and management at the district level need training. Cambodia's long-term solutions lie in education.

Rural society development Rural based, gradual education of the next generation is crucial to Cambodia. Resources for education provided by the international community are often concentrated in Phnom Penh. A greater proportion of these funds need to be designated to the rural areas where most of the population resides.

Leadership training The isolation of the Cambodian leadership needs to be broken down by exposing them to experiences and other examples of how things can be done elsewhere. A low-key study tour for political leaders to meet counter-parts in their operations was suggested (although similar efforts by the United States have not been highly effective). It was emphasized that training should be at the government management level, not just strengthening of NGOs.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Overall there was general agreement by the workshop participants that the situation in Cambodia is not going to change quickly. Canada should not disengage its involvement and Cambodians ultimately must make decisions regarding their future. Canada should use the upcoming election as an opportunity to review it's current involvement in Cambodia with the aim to increase its bilateral programming, and look at a comprehensive strategy for future engagement with Cambodia - which should include assisting Cambodia to educate their young, reforming their judiciary, supporting democratic development, creating a neutral media, supporting NGOs and working towards ridding the country of mines.

5.0 EVALUATION

Overall participants were very pleased with the roundtable discussion. Although some key players were not able to attend, there was a high level of discussion and collective expertise in the room. The following notes highlight participant's feedback from the evaluation forms.

What did you like about the roundtable discussion?

- brought together a group of committed specialists who spoke frankly and constructively
- very policy focused, excellent and diverse group of experts
- excellent exchange of sometimes very divergent views
- everything - particularly the people who attended who gave me a great opportunity to update my knowledge and information about Cambodia
- all of it - the free flow of views
- variety of positions, civility
- it was wonderful to spend a day discussing Cambodia in depth with knowledgeable people
- detailed discussion about the Canadian government's role in Cambodia
- calibre of participants, effective chairmanship
- well organized and very enjoyable day, good range of people and a good facilitator
- open discussion and full participation of all participants
- well managed process - enjoyed chance to explore insights and issues with other experience professionals - glad the process had a process

What didn't you like about the day?

- perhaps wider "Cambodian" presences and perhaps someone involved in economic transition
- interior rooms, no windows

- lack of representation from traditional Canadian NGO community active in Cambodia
- difficult to cover all bases and come up with clear priorities in one day with many people. Any chance of continuing the discussion?
- lack of Canadian government policy viewpoints - too much of the vague and non-committal policy speak from government representatives
- facilitator intervened at times
- could have been more than one article in reading kit
- would have liked to see those participants who were on the original participants list present

Please rank the following (1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=very good, 5=excellent)

background reading kit	1:0	2:0	3: 2	4:7	5:4
morning panel	1:0	2:0	3:1	4:7	5:4
afternoon panel	1:0	2:0	3:0	4:7	5:4
facilitation	1:0	2:0	3:1	4:5	5:6
participants	1:0	2:0	3:1	4:5	5:7
physical space	1:0	2:1	3:1	4:4	5:7
food	1:0	2:0	3:1	4:4	5:8

Do you think the roundtable discussions adequately addressed the guiding question? Guiding question: What role should Canada play in Cambodia during and after the elections?

- All participants agreed that the roundtable addressed the guiding quesiton

Other comments:

- a major omission was representation from the CCDP NGO consortium
- as a follow-up there might be a fall roundtable and one which might include DFAITS peacebuilding division. If we will indeeed be reassessing Canada's policy towards Cambodia, it would be useful to regroup and also to try to build excitement for peacebuilding in Cambodia within DFAIT

6.0 COORDINATION

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